

USDA announces options to change food grading

WASHINGTON, DC—The U.S. Department of Agriculture last Friday asked for public comment on a number of proposed options to change its food grading program. The changes would affect the grade names USDA applies to the foods it grades for quality.

Carol Tucker Foreman, assistant secretary of agriculture for food and consumer services said, "Our grading program should be one that consumers can understand and use. Research indicates that the program may not be meeting consumers' needs. We will evaluate public comment on our options and propose changes in our grading regulations later, if warranted."

To gather public comment on the options, USDA officials will hold three public hearings:

July 1 at Fisher Theater, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa, from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.;

July 16 at the Multi-Service Senior Center, 330 Fifth St. North St. Petersburg, Fla., from 10 a.m. to 8 p.m.; and

Aug. 7 at the Jack Tar Hotel, 1101 Van Ness Ave., San Francisco, Calif., from 10 a.m. to 8 p.m.

Spanish translators will be available at the St. Petersburg hearing.

Under the present system, USDA commodity graders determine levels of quality for foods such as meat,

poultry, eggs, dairy products, fruits and vegetables, and apply a variety of official grade names such as U.S. Prime, U.S. Fancy, and U.S. Grade AA. The grading service is voluntary and paid for by food producers.

The wide variation in grade names has been criticized by consumer groups and by a number of Congressional and other reports, Foreman said. A recent nationwide consumer survey done for USDA confirmed that the present system of grade names is confusing to consumers, she said.

She said the options for change are:

Adopt a completely uniform grade name policy by using U.S. Grades A, B, and C or U.S. Grades AA, A and B for all graded foods;

Keep the present system of grade names for meat and fresh fruits and vegetables and use U.S. Grades A, B, and C or U.S. Grades AA, A, and B for all other graded foods;

Retain present grade names for adopt a separate consumer color coding system in which one color would represent each quality level for all graded foods;

Require grade labeling at the retail level if a product is graded and labeled at the wholesale or packer level. (Such labeling, even when the product has been officially graded at the

wholesale level, is now voluntary).

The options under consideration will be published in the May 30 Federal Register, which is available at most local libraries.

"Since public opinion is of vital importance at every

step in the process of change," Foreman said, "we are making efforts to provide adequate opportunities for all citizens to participate. For example, we've planned evening hearing sessions for those who work, and will provide

Spanish translators for the St. Petersburg hearing."

To testify at the public hearings, individuals should send their name and address to Public Participation Staff, Food Safety and Quality Service, USDA, Room 1168-S, 12th and Independence

S.W., Washington, D.C. 20250, at least two weeks before the date of the hearing at which they want to testify.

However, each hearing will include an "open mike" session, so that all those who want to testify may do so.

Western Pa. milk order to get assessment boost

PITTSBURGH—An order issued by the U.S. Department of Agriculture will change payment, pooling, and other provisions of the Eastern Ohio-Western Pennsylvania federal milk market order.

P.R. Smith, assistant secretary of agriculture for marketing and transportation services, said the changes have been approved by over 90 percent of the dairy farmers voting in a referendum on the matter. Their approval was necessary before the changes previously recommended by USDA could be put into effect. The USDA recommendation was based on the record of a public hearing.

A major change in the order, Smith said, will base advertising and promotion assessments on the average price handlers pay farmers for their milk instead of the fixed rate previously used. Initially, this will increase

the assessment to nine cents per hundredweight (45 kilograms) of milk from five cents.

The change, which is designed to keep pace with increased costs of operating the advertising and promotion program, will not

affect the price consumers pay for milk at retail outlets in the market order area.

Smith also said that another major change will modify the requirement that the market administrator collect all handler obligations and then pay the

dairy farmers. This imposed on handlers buying milk directly from individual farmers and added cash flow burden that was found unnecessary.

The amended order was published in the May 30 Federal Register.

Berks youth sponsor steer show

READING—On May 24, Berks County held their first spring show. It was a big success, held at Ken-Rose farm. The show had a total of 18 steers.

The ribbons were handed out on the Danish systems. The judge was Greg Snyder from Lehigh County. After the show, Greg gave a brief demonstration on showing and fitting.

The following are the results:

16-17 Year Old Fitting
Darlene Dietrich, Blue, Lianne Haas, Blue, Ronald Heffner, Red, Carol Strause, Red.

Showing
Darlene Dietrich, Blue, Lianne Haas, Blue, Ronald Heffner, Red, Carol Strause, Red.

13 Year Old Fitting

Kirk Fisher, Blue, Kenianne Rarick, Blue, Lynn Lorah, Blue, James Heffner, Red.

Showing
Kirk Fisher, Blue, Kenianne Rarick, Blue, Lynn Lorah, Blue, James Heffner, Blue.

12 Years Old Fitting
Troy Werley, Blue, Greg Zook, Blue, Karen Rabenold, Red, Michelle Harley, Red.

Showing
Troy Werley, Blue, Greg Zook, Blue, Karen Rabenold, Blue, Michelle Harley, Blue.

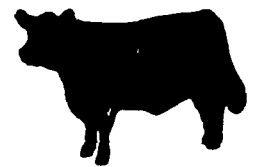
10-11 Years Old Fitting

Andy Haas, Blue, Greg Strickler, Blue, Marianne Yanos, Red, Glenn Heffner, Red.

Showing
Andy Haas, Blue, Marianne Yanos, Blue, Glenn Heffner, Red, Greg Strickler, Red.

8-9 Years Old Fitting & Showing
Both classes received Blue. Kent Fisher, Blue, Lori Rabenold, Blue.

On behalf of the Berks County Beef Club a real big "thank you" went to Herby Heffner for the loading chute and Greg Snyder for judging.



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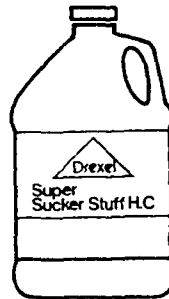
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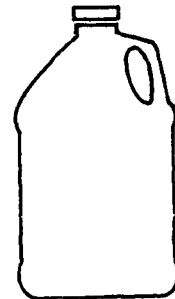
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of tobacco

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